SCIENTISTS WARN ATOM POWER FOES

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Say Public Must Back Gains or Give Up Conveniences

By NANCY HICKS

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UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., Aug. 15—An international gathering of scientists and businessmen concerned with atomic energy in effect told an increasingly hostile public this week that it would have to choose between air-conditioners, dishwashers, on the one hand and, on the other, greater responsibility for the effects—notably environmental pollution—of increased power demands.

In one paper, Dr. Chauncey Starr, dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science of the University of California at Los Angeles, developed a philosophical approach to deal with the problem of risk-versus-benefits in future atomic energy production.

'Trade-offs' of Risks

He said that in all of American activities there are "trade-offs" between risks and acceptability.

"There are contradictory assumptions in the operations of our society," he said. "First, it is commonly accepted that everyone should have the opportunity for a natural death. Second, it is commonly accepted that every individual should have an opportunity to use and enjoy the fruits of our centuries of technological development.

"Third, it is the philosophy of an egalitarian society that where the activities of an individual infringe on others in an undesirable way, the society may intervene to control individual activities in order to achieve a balance betwen group well-being and the privileges of the individual. It is evident that these inherent assumptions are not compatible."

He added that the risks that the American public was willing to take in sports and transportation was about statistically equal to the death rate caused by disease. He suggested this might be a yardstick to use in determining the probable safety of controversial, risk-benefit questions involved in atomic energy safety, contraceptive pills and the like.

Some scientists, however, have said that these problems of long-range risk are not realistic because power is just a stopgap measure until some method can be found to harness solar energy, a finite source, for electric energy production.

TRIBUS

1. Do you know of any analytical criticism of Starr's approach. It is only too easy to parody it, unfairly, like the ~~fanatic~~ fantasies attached -- no I won't even bother enclosing them-- but its underlying assumptions need to be looked at critically. Have you seen anything in print?

2. This is my own contribution to the half-truths about the health cost of nuclear energy.

3. Re water injection into stratosphere.

4. How far can that go! (re nerve gas). But if the Army can't or won't publish some figures on measuring the half-life of VX in sea-water, we won't move much further. ~~Does NOAA have any such a number.~~ My chemical intuition suggests it should be very short.

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